

Classroom Debates – A One Page Tutorial

The debating process is bound by a set of parliamentary rules. The rules govern the sequence and time frame of the debate. Procedures vary slightly relative to the country of origin. The classroom teacher has the flexibility to proceed as circumstances dictate. This is a suggested outline. Adapt it as needed.



1. A debate includes three groups. They are the (a) affirmative team, (b) the opposing or negative team and (c) the judge(s). The debating teams must be of equal number. A teacher may choose to be the sole adjudicator or may ask students to participate in the process. The use of a rubric guides the evaluation. For classroom use, it is not the success at winning the debate but rather the evidence of preparation and quality of delivery that is important.
2. If necessary, pre-teach the debating technique. Many helps exist that describe the rules governing debates. The method employed in the classroom need not (or cannot) follow these guidelines. See the student Q&A form. If a teacher chooses to ask students to act as peer judges, the layout may look as follows. The teacher of course asks as a judge as well. It's the teacher that ultimately assigns a mark.

Affirmative Team

Negative Team

Chairperson (Teacher)

Judge (student)

Judge (student)

Judge (student)

AUDIENCE

3. Assign students in groups, typically 2 or 3, the topics for debate and the position they will support. You may wish to discuss the fact that students may be arguing a position they do not support. This is a learning opportunity for them. A student handout on preparing for a debate is available where this document is stored. Distribute copies to the team members. Clarify with students how they will be judged. Show them the rubric that will be used for evaluation. Describe the procedures that students will be following. Give the students copies of the Q&A document and the preparation form.
4. On the day of the debate, prepare the room layout to facilitate the debate(s). Distribute blank rubrics to the students assigned as judges. The diagram shows three, but the number is at your discretion.
5. Run the debate. Ask follow-up questions as appropriate and collect evaluation forms from student judges. If desired, you may take an informal poll of which team delivered the stronger argument.